

8 Multiculturalism, Indian philosophy, and conflicts over cuisine

Lisa Kemmerer

The International Food Fair is always a popular event at Montana State University Billings (MSUB), where I work. The dining hall is crowded with booths smelling of spices from Saudi Arabia and China, tended by international students eager to share their favorite foods with their newfound friends. For the cooks and those doling out food, there is perhaps “an imagined community implied in the act of eating food ‘from home’ while in exile, in the embodied knowledge that others are eating the same food” (Sutton 2001: 84). For locals, it is a time when meat-and-potato-eating ranch-raised students sample spicy rice dishes, tidy egg rolls, and other cultural, culinary delicacies prepared diligently by fellow students. The International Food Fair is a multicultural moment at our little university – one of precious few such moments in Billings, Montana – a time of promoting and sharing multiple cultural traditions.

The United States came into being and continues to take shape through the introduction of people from diverse cultures from around the world. Cuisine is central to culture, and the United States is a nation rich with food possibilities. Every city of any size offers cuisine from China, Thailand, Mexico, Mongolia, and India, while larger cities offer a host of other international culinary options. Additionally, international food fairs are fairly common. In the United States it is somewhat commonplace to celebrate diversity and promote multiculturalism through food.

This is also true at Montana State University, a campus that takes pride in being accessible to diverse peoples. (Our motto is “Access and Excellence.”) Yet I notice that certain types of cultural dishes are conspicuously absent at our international food fair. For example, Korean students never offer *boshintang*; Japanese students do not offer *sanma aisu*; Philippian students never bring *balut*; and Chinese students fail to offer a dish that translates as “dragon, tiger, phoenix big braise”. If the food fair is about sharing cultures, celebrating diversity, and promoting multiculturalism, why are these particular delicacies and mainstays so profoundly absent at every MSUB International Food Fair?

To answer this question, we only need to examine these dishes more carefully. *Boshintang* is a Korean soup made with dog meat. *Sanma aisu* is fish

ice cream. *Balut* is a boiled duck or chicken embryo four days before it would have hatched. “Dragon, tiger, phoenix big braise” is a mix of flesh from snakes, cats (usually domestic), and pheasants. These dishes are not exactly the sorts of foods one finds at the Billings corner grocery store. Indeed, locals are likely to be disgusted and outraged by a dish featuring snake flesh or leg-of-cat.

We might expect the ranching state of Montana – a state with more than twice as many cattle as people and a state where vegetarians and vegans often complain that they are marginalized¹ – to be more open to such meaty meals (“All Cattle”; “Montana Population”). But these dishes would be met by the vast majority of MSUB students, as elsewhere in North America, with horror, disgust, and revulsion. Apparently, local sentiments about eating cats and snakes prevent international students from sharing these cultural delicacies at multicultural events. But is not the point of multiculturalism to let go of prejudices, of normative practices, and be part of something larger than local traditions? Does not multiculturalism – sharing and promoting the splendors of multiple cultural traditions – *require* that chick embryos and dog ribs be brought to the table and that the majority welcome these cultural delicacies?

For human beings, “food preferences and taboos, are deeply social” (Alkon 2013: 664). Cultures – clothes, dance, sports, language, art, religion, music, cuisine – tend to be extremely important to human beings, and nothing is quite as personal as what we eat. “Food – what is chosen from available possibilities, how it is presented, how it is eaten, with whom and when, and how much time is allotted to cooking and eating – is one of the means by which a society creates itself and acts out its aims and fantasies” (Visser 1987: 12). Few (if any) cultural differences create the intense reactions created by food, and this is as true in Montana as it is in South Carolina or South Africa: wear your sari, speak German, dance the drum dance – but if you are eating with mainstream America, best not to bring dog meat or a fetal chicken to the communal table (Kymlicka and Donaldson). In *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and Society*, Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil write, “When humans eat, they eat with the mind as much as with the mouth” (1997: 53). In short, cultural tensions are rife in foodways, and if not always the main course, they are at least a side dish at every multicultural meal.

The power of food is evidenced in the centrality of food to “broad-ranging social movements” (Alkon 2013: 675). For example, in the Southern United States, white supremacy was mirrored and maintained in entrenched Southern foodways that were as difficult to change as it was essential that they be changed if the South was to experience anything remotely like equality. New Deal programs “identified ‘southern diet’ and ‘southern cookery’ – two distinctly different views of the region’s food – as both the South’s greatest problem and most beloved treasure” (Ferris 2012: 7). Food and food-sharing are sullied with the weight of prejudice and privilege around the globe. Food is “unequally available based on hierarchies of race, class,

gender”, nationality, and so on (Alkon 2013: 667). This is nowhere more evident than with regard to meat, which is commonly associated with wealth and good health, as well as with manly strength (Adams 2003: 36). Consumption of dairy – a food choice that many people in other nations associate with the United States – is on the rise: cow’s milk has become a “metaphor for individual and national power and wealth” (Wiley 2011: 1).

Multiculturalism would seem positioned to encourage communities to swing wide that refrigerator door so we can gather around the community table to appreciate the cultural, culinary splendors of our neighbors. Multiculturalism would seem poised to encourage us to open our minds and our mouths, to set aside our prejudices, and bring on that *boshintang*, *sanma aisu*, *balut*, and “dragon, tiger, phoenix big braise” at the community table.

In light of the cultural complexity and cultural significance of foods, we ought not to assume, but to carefully assess what stand multiculturalism ought to take with regard to food planning for community meals. A brief examination of foundational Indian philosophy offers insights as to why it might make sense to *reject* certain food categories at community meals. This, in turn, invites a wider examination of religious ethics and food prescriptions. A survey of contemporary animal agricultural practices offers further insights as to how religious ethics ought to be reflected in the contemporary world – and the voices of a few contemporary Hindus provide examples. After briefly touching on physiology and racism, common practices at MSUB exemplify the need for a strong and somewhat unexpected influence from multiculturalism with regard to community meals.

Dietary restrictions and culture

Most traditional Hindus do not consume meat – and they have not for centuries – consistent with foundational Indian philosophical teachings such as *ahimsa*, karma, and reincarnation. Indian philosophy continues to shape Indian culture, especially for those within India’s dominant religion, Hinduism. How are *ahimsa*, karma, and reincarnation central to Indian cuisine?

Ahimsa

Ahimsa, which literally means “not to harm” or “noninjury”, carries an injunction for “non-injury toward all living beings” (Jacobson 1994: 287). *Ahimsa* is “the first and foremost ethical principle of every Hindu”, who is thereby called to abstain “from causing hurt or harm to all beings” (Subramuniyaswami 1993: 195). *Ahimsa* “is not simply a matter of refraining from actual, physical harm. *Ahimsa* is the absence of even a desire to do harm to any living being, in thought, word, or deed” (Long 2009: 97). While the Hindu worldview holds that people “have no special privilege or authority over other creatures”, human beings “do have more obligations and duties”, including *ahimsa* (Dwivedi 2000: 6). The cardinal Hindu virtue

is "compassion for all" (Subramuniaswami 1993: 183), and Hindus are encouraged to practice nonviolence toward "the community of all beings" (Kinsley 1995: 65).

The Hindu moral obligation for *ahimsa* is exemplified in the *Mahabharata*, when Yudhishtira (a moral hero) finds himself in a great desert where he is befriended by a small dog. All of his beloved human companions die for want of water, while the dog survives. When the God Indra pulls up in his chariot to rescue Yudhishtira from the desert, Yudhishtira first inquires as to the whereabouts of his lost human companions. He is told that they have "gone before" (*Mahabharata* 1973: 365). Lord Indra encourages Yudhishtira to join his fallen companions, but Yudhishtira is concerned about the dog:

"Lord of the Past and Present," said Yudhishtira, "this little dog who is my last companion must also go."

"No," said Indra. "You cannot enter heaven with a dog at your heels. . . ."

"He is devoted to me and looks to me for protection. Left alone he would die here."

"There is no place for dogs in heaven. . . . It cannot be."

Yudhishtira frowned. "It cannot be otherwise."

"Don't you understand: *You have won heaven!* Immortality and prosperity and happiness in all directions are yours. Only leave that animal and come with me; that will not be cruel."

(*Mahabharata* 1973: 365–366)

With regard to *ahimsa*, Yudhishtira's reply, and Indra's attempts to barter with the dog's life, are nothing short of profound:

"I do not turn away my dog; I turn away you. I will not surrender a faithful dog to you. . . ."

"But I can't take him! I'll put him to sleep; there will be no pain. No one will know."

"Lord of Heaven," said Yudhishtira, "you have my permission to go."

"Your splendor will fill the three worlds if you will but enter my car alone," said Indra. "You have left everyone else – why not this worthless dog?"

"I am decided," answered Yudhishtira.

(*Mahabharata* 1973: 365–366)

Yudhishtira will not sacrifice the dog's life, even painlessly – *even for eternal bliss*. Here Hindus see a moral and spiritual champion, Yudhishtira, the hero-son of the god of moral and cosmic law, turn away the powerful Indra – simultaneously rejecting a life in paradise with his loved ones – in light of his spiritual/moral responsibility to a stray dog.

As the *Mahabharata* continues to unfold, the stray dog transforms into Yudhishtira's father, none other than Dharma (the god of moral and eternal

law), who praises Yudhishtira for his steadfast moral commitment to the dog – even against the will of a powerful god, even if he must sacrifice his own eternal happiness. While many might view Indra's advice to ditch the dog and run for heaven common sense – justifiable self-interest – Hindu moral law, rooted in *ahimsa*, does not.

Reincarnation

Reincarnation (transmigration) is the belief that, after death, the imperishable *atman* (perhaps best translated as "soul") takes lodging in another body. Indian philosophy holds that time has no beginning, which means that reincarnation has been in play for eons. Across incalculable ages, each *atman* has moved from birth to birth, from body to body, dwelling in billions of species. Each *atman* has been a Namdapha flying squirrel and an Andaman spiny shrew, one day a capped leaf monkey, the next an Indus River Dolphin. In this way reincarnation creates bonds between every living being, and diminishes the human tendency to view human beings as separate and distinct from other creatures, or from one another. Every animal, whether primate or rodent or human, has been reincarnated as our mother, brother, or best friend at some point across the incalculable eons. For Hindus (and other Indian religions), our present manifestation is merely "an infinitesimal part of a much larger picture that encompasses all of life" (Kinsley 1995: 64).

Karma

Karma means "action". Karma is an unavoidable force, like gravity – but karma is a force of justice whereby "every act carries with it an inevitable result" (Embree 1972: 51). In the Hindu worldview, reincarnation (the nature of one's next life) rests on karma. We are the rulers of our fate; we reap precisely what we sow. Daily actions determine our karma and our future fate.

In the Hindu worldview all living beings are in moral relationship with one another (Curtin 1995: 71). Hindu texts expounding Hindu philosophy and practice (*Shastras*) note that in seeking to cut the bonds of karma, one should do what is "good for all creatures" (O'Flaherty 1988: 124). Indian philosophy teaches that when we harm others, we ultimately harm ourselves: The "pain a human being causes other living beings . . . will have to be suffered by that human being later, either in this life or in a later rebirth" (Jacobson 1994: 289). Therefore, those aspiring to relatively pain-free future existences must avoid even accidental harm or killing (Basham 1989: 59).

Ahimsa, reincarnation, karma, and diet

Why and how do *ahimsa*, reincarnation, and karma affect the Hindu diet? The *Mahabharata* calls attention to Indian philosophy and dietary choice

through Bhishma, one of the most respected heroes in this much-loved epic, as he extols nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and renounces the eating of flesh:

25. Nonviolence is the highest dharma [duty], . . .
by this dharma [one's duty] is done
26. Meat is not born of grass, wood, or rock.
Meat arises from killing a living being.
Thus, in the enjoyment of meat there is fault . . .
29. If there were no meat-eaters,
there would be no killers.
A meat-eating man is a killer indeed,
causing death for the purpose of food.
30. If meat were considered not to be food,
there would be no violence.
Violence is done to animals
for the sake of the meat-eater only.
31. Because the life of violent ones
is shortened as well (due to their deeds),
the one who wishes long life for himself
should refuse meat. . . .
32. Those fierce ones who do violence to life
. . . are to be feared by beings as beasts of prey.
(Chapple 1996: 118–119)

The *Mahabharata* also states that the “one who kills beings for the sake of food is the lowest sort of person, a maker of great sin” (Chapple 1996: 120). In light of reincarnation and karma, we harm ourselves when we eat others. The *Manu Smriti* (*Laws of Manu*), one of the oldest and most important Hindu law texts, warns that one “who kills an animal for meat will die of a violent death as many times as there are hairs on that killed animal” (Dwivedi 2000: 7). In light of reincarnation, many Hindus view “wanton killing of animals [as] little better than murder, and meat eating [as] little better than cannibalism” (Basham 1989: 58). In the Hindu worldview, eating hens or cows is “like eating the flesh of one's own son” (Chapple 1996: 114).

Indian philosophy teaches that one cannot eat meat and live a peaceful, harmonious life (Subramuniaswami 1993: 201). The *Manu Smriti* refers to a vegetarian as a “friend of all living beings” (Chapple 1996: 113). Even though the consumer never touches the living animal, from the Indian point of view, a flesh eater's hands are stained with blood: “the meat eater's desire for meat drives another to kill and provide that meat. The act of the butcher begins with the desire of the consumer” (Subramuniaswami 1993: 201). Consequently, anyone who buys “flesh performs *himsa* (violence) by his wealth; he who eats flesh does so by enjoying its taste; the killer does *himsa* by actually tying and killing the animal” (Subramuniaswami 1993: 205).

For traditional Hindus, avoidance of meat and eggs is a religious commitment. *Ahimsa*, reincarnation, and karma lead Hindus to avoid eating anymals² (any animal other than my own species) and eggs. Avoiding animal products is “a way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings, for to consume meat, fish, fowl or eggs is to participate indirectly in acts of cruelty and violence” (Subramuniaswami 1993: 201). Indeed, Hindus have tended to be lacto-vegetarian for centuries (although coastal communities, in particular, also consume a fair amount of fish); avoidance of meat remains standard practice for millions of Hindus as “a function of inherited cultural practice” (Yadav and Kumar 2006).³ Cows in particular would never be killed or consumed in a Hindu community because they are revered; they are associated with the beloved God, Krishna. Meaty McDonalds built its first vegetarian franchise in New Delhi in order to avoid what would surely be viewed as culinary cruelties – best to offer what someone in the area chooses to eat (CBSNEWS 2012).

In spite of hundreds of years of British influence followed by decades of influence from the United States, Indian philosophy and religion remain visible in the Hindu tendency toward a lacto-vegetarian diet. For traditional Hindus, this diet is not mere preference, religious requirement rooted deep in an ancient, shared culture. With regard to diet, “religion and community matter” (Yadav and Kumar 2006). Avoidance of all flesh is “*dharma*” or duty – a requirement – for traditional Hindus (Dwivedi 2000: 7).

Religions and the global table

Among religions born in India (Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions), teachings of compassion and simplicity are frequently expressed in dietary proscriptions against the consumption of animal products, but such teachings are universal in the world's dominant religious traditions. In fact, every major religion encourages a diet free of bloodshed and suffering. This should not be surprising given that the world's major religions are each rooted in a morality of compassion and care, especially toward those comparatively weak and helpless (Kemmerer 2012: 282).

Judaism, for example, carries “a profound moral commitment to respect” anymals (Cohn-Sherbok 2006: 90). Well-respected Jewish authors encourage readers to be merciful and kind to all that God has created (*Little Sefer Hasidim*) (Schochet 1984: 246). In the words of Rabbi Sherira Gaon (10th century), anymals were created so that “good should be done to them” (Kalechofsky 2006: 95). The “Hebrew phrase *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim* provides a biblical mandate not to cause ‘pain to any living creature’” (Schwartz 2001: 15). Judaism teaches that “God condemns and harshly punishes cruelty to animals” (Regenstein 1991: 21). The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Code of Jewish Law*) is explicit about our obligation not to harm anymals: “It is forbidden, according to the law of the Torah, to inflict pain upon any living creature. On the contrary, it is our duty to relieve the pain of any creature” (Ganzfried

1961: 84; Schwartz 2001: 19; Cohn-Sherbok 2006: 83). Humans, made in the image of God, are to reflect divine compassion (Schochet 1984: 144). The Tanakh teaches: "As God is compassionate, . . . so you should be compassionate" (Schwartz 2001: 16). Perhaps most telling, God creates a vegan world in Genesis (Gen. 2:15–16; Gen. 1:29–31). Not surprisingly, Genesis 2:15–16 records that people are permitted to eat of every tree but one – a vegan diet. Similarly, Genesis 1:29 ordains a vegan diet: "I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit. They will be yours for food".

Christians share the Jewish creation story of Genesis, and therefore worship a God who created a vegan world, a world in which "no creature was to feed on another" (Hyland 1988: 21). Jesus, the quintessential moral exemplar, lived a life devoted to the service of weak and imperfect beings. His overall message speaks of compassion and service of the strong for the weak, of the high for the lowly. The Gospels portray Jesus as engaging in self-sacrificing service to "the least of these" (Mat. 25:40). Christians are intended to stand as "witness to Christ's love, compassion, and peace" (Kaufman 2004: 48). Christian sensitivity to suffering measures fidelity to a compassionate Creator and is understood to originate in the munificence of divine love that connects each of us with the Almighty (Allen 1971: 214). Those who argue that love must first and foremost be directed toward humanity may as well argue that Christian love should first and foremost be directed toward Caucasians, Europeans, or the wealthy. If love is not expansive, it is not Christian love.

Islam shares the Judeo-Christian belief in a benevolent, all-powerful creator. "Islamic teachings have gone to great lengths to instill a sense of love, respect and compassion for animals" (Masri 45). Allah created the universe with the "breath of compassion" (Bakhtiar 1987: 16–17), and notes that any "act of cruelty toward animals is strongly forbidden" (Siddiq 2003: 455). Anymal rights are rooted in one no less than the creator, who "desires no injustice to His creatures" (Qur'an 3:105–110). In the world of Islam, "each creature has its rights accordingly", provided by Allah (Nasr 97), who "desires no injustice to His creatures" (Qur'an 3:105–110). Muslims are expected to treat this world, and all that has been created, with love: "a true Muslim is one who honors, sustains, and protects the lives of creatures of God and does not kill them for her own food" (Foltz 2005: 111). In the Islamic world, a vegan diet is ideal, so that anymals are "allowed to live their natural lives" without cruel exploitation, and without "having their throats slit" (Masri 2007: 56). Since the earliest days of Islam, there have been Muslims who "abstained from meat for spiritual reasons" (Foltz 2005: 109).

Among Chinese religious traditions, tenderness and altruism, kindness and benevolence are central to Confucian morality, and compassion is the ultimate virtue (Tu 1985: 81–84). In Confucian traditions, "sensitivity to animals is not only ethically suitable but also carries religious authority" (Taylor 2006: 294). Daoism also provides a "universalistic ethic" of compassion

that extends "not only to all humanity, but to the wider domain of all living things" (Kirkland 2001: 284). Sacred writings encourage people to be compassionate, nurturing, caring, and selfless "for the sake of all beings" (Kohn 2004: 68). Daoist precepts protect anymals and promote "compassion, empathy, and kindness" (Kohn 2004: 71). Daoist precepts usually contain five foundational precepts, the first of which is usually an injunction not to kill, including warnings against "eating meat" (Kohn 2004: 67–136). Key texts for the Daoist clergy teach: "Do not kill or harm anything that lives in order to satisfy your own appetites [22a]. Always behave with compassion and grace to all, even insects and worms" (Kohn 2004: 255–256). Because dairy products are largely absent across China, many "vegetarians" are actually free of all anymal products with the possible exception of eggs. Monastery meals consist "largely of rice, wheat, and barley, combined with various vegetables and tofu. In Daoist religious literature, meat is not even mentioned among the five main food groups" (Kohn 2004: 51).

For Buddhists, no creature lies beyond spiritual concern (Martin 1985: 99), and "*ahimsa*, or noninjury, is an ethical goal" (Shinn 2000: 219). "Indeed, Buddhists see this orientation to the suffering of others as a *sine qua non* of ethical life" (Waldau 2002: 138). Buddhist practice is "built on the vast conception of universal love and compassion for all living beings" (Rahula 1959: 46) and requires "compassionate protection of all living beings" (Mizuno 1995: 132). The *Sutta Nipata* states plainly: Buddhists may not kill, cause to kill, or incite others to kill. They may "not injure any being, either strong or weak, in the world" (*Dhammika Sutta* [Snp 2.14]; Fausböll 26). A Tibetan Buddhist monk claims compassion as the root of Buddhist teachings and law (Tashi 2008). Indeed, compassion is "one of the indispensable conditions for deliverance" (Kushner 1981: 148–149). Across time, "many Buddhists have felt that meat-eating of any kind is out of harmony with the spirit of the Law of Righteousness, and have been vegetarians" (De Bary 1972: 91). Buddhist philosophy teaches that, just as surely as one who throws dirt into the wind will have dust in their eyes, a flesh-eater piles up negative karma (Kemmerer 2012: 107).

Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Daoism, and Buddhism teach an ethic of compassion and attentiveness to the need of those who are at our mercy, encouraging people to eat in a way that does not cause suffering. (Plants are not sentient and therefore cannot suffer, and so grains, tubers, leaves, fruits, and nuts are not proscribed.) While religious requirements for a vegan diet are less evident among mainstream Jews, Christians, and Muslims than among Hindus, these foundational moral teachings are evidenced in thriving contemporary organizations such as the Christian Vegetarian Association, Jewish Vegetarian Society, and Islamicconcern.com.

Those committed to *ahimsa*, compassion, or love in any of the world's dominant religious traditions forego flesh. For millions of people, including traditional Hindus, flesh is off the menu – *proscribed as a matter of religious ethics, as a matter of culture*. Additionally, eggs are proscribed for Hindus.

Indian philosophy, Hindu dietary proscriptions, and religious ethics more broadly have dropped a fly in the multicultural soup. Multiculturalism – sharing and promoting cultural traditions – would seem poised to encourage people to open their minds and their mouths to meaty meals of every kind from around the globe. But the Hindu tradition shows us why serving meat or eggs is serving a dish of exclusion. To choose to offer dishes at community feasts that a particular group of people will not be able to share exemplifies cultural ignorance and exclusivity. Why are we so oblivious to multicultural needs at the community table?

The soup thickens: *Ahimsa*, dairy, and multiculturalism

Indian philosophy has provided a springboard for exploring religious dietary ethics. *Ahimsa*, karma, and reincarnation are just one piece of a broader phenomenon: a religious ethic that runs across traditions, discouraging humanity from harming other creatures, and encouraging compassion. Religious ethics encourage a vegetarian diet. This means that, counterintuitively, multiculturalism should *not* ask that we eat cat meat and chick embryos, but rather that we provide only vegetarian fare at community meals.

We are gaining clarity into the phenomenon of food proscriptions, multiculturalism, and community meals, but there is yet more to digest. Are flesh and eggs the only products that we will need to remove from the community table?

Proper application of Hindu teachings such as *ahimsa* (as well as teachings such as Christian love and Islamic animal rights) requires that we understand how animal products are produced. And this requires that we examine contemporary animal agriculture. Only then can we know whether or not cheddar cheese and blueberry ice cream satisfy the requirements of *ahimsa*, compassion, and animal rights. The Hindu tradition provides an excellent springboard and backdrop for exploring animal agriculture.

Cows are cherished and protected among Hindus because they are vulnerable to human exploitation, and protecting cows is therefore an expression of *ahimsa* that is “symbolic of reverence and respect for all forms of life” (Kinsley 1995: 65). Cows also exemplify munificence and mother’s love. Harming such vulnerable, motherly beings is particularly offensive to Hindus. Therefore, how cattle are treated in the process of creating dairy products is pertinent to any sincere Hindu who consumes lemon yogurt or cream cheese.

Developed before the advent of factory farming, United States federal laws are narrow in their reach because they were formed before the advent of the cruelest of contemporary practices. More importantly, federal laws do not regulate the treatment of animals kept for meat, eggs, or milk. In order to avoid impinging on the enterprises of ranchers and farmers,

customary animal agriculture practices are exempt from animal cruelty statutes. Almost any industry practice is legal.

In the United States, farming and animal welfare are governed by only two federal laws: the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA), enacted in 1958, and the Twenty-Eight Hour Law, enacted in 1877. Perhaps the most famous federal animal-protection law and certainly the most ambitious attempt Congress has made to protect animals is the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). But the AWA does not apply to farm animals except when they are used for “research, testing, and teaching” – essentially making it blind to ninety-eight percent of all animals killed each year and inapplicable to farming and animal welfare.

(Matheny and Leahy 2007: 334)

Current U.S. laws offer a tiny bit of regulation for the slaughter of farmed animals through the HMSA. Additionally, farmed animals must be given a break if they are transported for more than 28 hours at a time. This leaves all that happens on the farm untouched, and the AWA does not provide any protection for farmed animals who are exploited for food – including dairy products. Those expecting laws to require compassion (or even common decency) in the treatment of farmed animals will find no such laws in the United States.

Economics drives U.S. animal agriculture. But other businesses do not revolve around the lives of massive numbers of animals. In the industry of animal agriculture, individual animals are viewed as expendable – birthed to be killed in adolescence. Those running animal agriculture businesses weigh the costs of essential veterinary care, housing, and feed against returns – profits – which are the ultimate purpose and guiding principle for Big Ag (Bakan 2004: 36–37; Matheny and Leahy 2007: 329). Consequently, the term “animal welfare,” used “in conjunction with current industry guidelines is inappropriate . . . in many cases the guidelines fail to provide what an average American would consider basic animal care” (Farm Sanctuary 2005: 71). This is true for all types of animal agriculture in the United States.

The extraordinary suffering that is common among farmed animals in the United States shapes the lives of cows and calves who are exploited in the dairy industry. Cows must be impregnated each year so they will give birth and lactate. They carry their young for ten months, but at birth their calves are snatched from their watchful eyes. Cows – like most mothers – try desperately to protect and keep newborns, but are powerless against the humans who own them and control their lives (Kemmerer 2011: 174). In the United States dairy industry, cows are dehorned and tails are docked without anesthesia. They can be motivated with electric prods, tied perpetually in stalls, and slaughtered without stunning (Farm Sanctuary 2005: 4). What would Krishna think of such insensitivity to a mother cow?

Most fundamentally, “dairy” cows endure mechanized milking for ten out of twelve months every year (and for the first year, this includes the first seven months of a nine-month pregnancy). Cows naturally produce just over two tons of milk per year, but with Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH/BST) cows provide as much as thirty tons of milk annually, enough for *ten* calves. As a result of this excess, one-in-five factory farmed “dairy” cows secretes pus from her udders (which invariably mixes with her milk) (Kemmerer 2011: 174; Kemmerer 2012: 293). Cows are so exhausted by the process of repeated calving, the loss of their calves, and intense milking, that they are often “spent” and sent to slaughter after four or five years of perpetual birth and lactation, although cows can live upwards of twenty years. Their aged flesh is used for soup, burgers, or processed foods. Most cows are pregnant when slaughtered (Kemmerer 2011: 174; Kemmerer 2012: 293). Those practicing *ahimsa* will not purchase products that stem from such cruelty.

Anyone who buys dairy products also supports and enables the veal industry: the veal industry exists because of the strength of the dairy industry (Kemmerer 2011: 174). Calves born of cows who are exploited by the dairy industry can be removed from their mothers before they even touch the ground. They are

typically tethered by the neck or confined in individual stalls, or both; the stalls are so small that the calves cannot turn around during their entire sixteen to eighteen week lives. Immobilizing calves reduces labor and housing costs and prevents muscle development, making the resulting meat a pale color, preferred by some consumers.

(Matheny and Leahy 2007: 332)

Every year one million calves suffer and die for veal. Cows exploited for dairy suffer longer than cattle exploited for beef, and in many ways their suffering is more acute.⁴ Hindus in the United States who wish to practice *ahimsa*, and who make dietary choices with an eye to reincarnation and karma, must choose vegan.

Indeed, informed Hindus turn away from dairy. Mahatma Gandhi was raised lacto-vegetarian (Shinn 2000: 219; Gandhi 2002: 12). He taught that spiritual progress requires us to “cease to kill our fellow creatures for the satisfaction of our bodily wants” (Roberts 2006: 119). Consistent with Hindu philosophy of karma and reincarnation, Gandhi viewed killing anymals for food as ultimately killing “ourselves, our body and soul” (Roberts 2006: 124). On learning of “the tortures to which cows and buffaloes were subjected by their keepers”, Gandhi stopped consuming milk from these sources (Gandhi 1993: 272–273, 328).

Anuradha Sawhney, a contemporary Hindu, states that only through *ahimsa*, by not harming other beings, can we acquire “good karma” (Sawhney 2011). She notes that “being compassionate towards animals comes easy because I am a Hindu and a vegan” (Sawhney 2011).

Dr. Alka Arora, an Indian-American feminist scholar who grew up in a Hindu home, notes that most Hindu vegetarians avoid meat because they view meat-eating as violent, but they tend to view the consumption of milk products not only as harmless, but as noble. She goes on to say that Hindus revere cows as “mother-like”, sharing their milk with a needy world, but that Hindus must recognize the extent of the suffering now experienced by both cows and calves in the process of milk production: “our beloved ‘mother cow’ is repeatedly raped, separated from her calves, confined in small spaces, and eventually killed for meat. There is immense, intrinsic suffering in the production of milk – and the dairy industry is inseparable from the meat industry” (Arora 2015, pers. comm.). Arora concludes that contemporary milk production methods indicate “that Hindus should adhere to a vegan diet rather than a vegetarian diet” (Arora 2015, pers. comm.).

Hinduism offers a sound philosophical framework – *ahimsa*, karma, and reincarnation – for their traditional foods. The idea of *ahimsa* is echoed in each of the world’s great religions, and as information about anymal agriculture becomes better known, the consumption of dairy will be as problematic as the consumption of flesh. For many ethical and religious vegans it already is. Exploring anymal agriculture demonstrates that those committed to any religious ethic of compassion must forgo not only flesh and eggs, but also dairy. *All* anymal products are saturated with suffering. Consequently, those providing multicultural meals – those intending to offer foods to be shared by *all*, including devout Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, will plan vegan meals.

The nail in the coffin: Lactose intolerance

Religious proscriptions against cruelty are not the only concern with regard to multiculturalism and dairy at community meals – there are also physiological concerns. Anthropologist Marvin Harris divides communities into “‘lactophiles’ and ‘lactophobes’” (Harris 1985: 130–131); hatred or love of cow’s milk is “a profound delineator of cultural difference” (Wiley 2011: 11). Lactophiles are definitely in the minority, and are localized among those of northern European descent, pastoralists of West and East Africa, as well as among Middle Eastern and Central Asian populations, where dairy has been consumed for long periods of time (Harris 1985: 130–153). Outside of these areas, dairy products are somewhat rare due to lactose intolerance, a condition in which the body cannot digest dairy products, including 40 million Americans. Ninety percent of the Asian American community and ninety percent of the Black or African-American community are lactose intolerant (Harper 2012; Statistic Brain Research Institute 2015). Due to entrenched racism, the assumption in the United States is generally that “most people have a Euro-Anglo-Saxon relationship to food” and can digest dairy products (Harper 2012).

For those with lactose intolerance, diets devoid of dairy are not a moral proscription, but rather a physiological necessity: consuming dairy products causes diarrhea, abdominal cramps, bloating, gas, nausea, and sometimes vomiting (Mayo Clinic 2015b). For the majority of humanity, a dairy-free diet is a matter of basic wellbeing. In contrast, there appears to be no group of people physiologically incapable of eating plant products – indeed, consuming plants and plant products is essential to human health. Indian philosophy – the idea of *ahimsa* – can inform multiculturalism: to care about others is to serve what they can eat. This requires a vegan menu at any multicultural meal.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch . . . multiculturalism in Montana?

Montana State University Billings is fortunate to attract international students from India, students that are very likely to be practicing *ahimsa* with an eye to karma and reincarnation, and who are likely accustomed to a strict lacto-vegetarian diet. For these students, hamburgers are not only proscribed, but extremely offensive. Moreover, there are roughly two million Hindus in the United States, suggesting that *local* students are also likely to be Hindu, with dietary practices that proscribe flesh – especially cow's flesh (OntarioTolerance.org 2015).

MSUB also welcomes people from a handful of other nations, at least some of whom must be committed to a fundamental religious ethic that requires compassion, whether Buddhist, Christian, Daoist, Muslim, or Jewish. Should not multiculturalism take these common religious proscriptions into consideration when planning community meals?

Yes, but instead MSUB kicks off the school year with both a hamburger grill *and* an ice cream social. At least some students are likely to be excluded from these events on cultural grounds – more specially, due to religious ethics. Building a community event around food choices that are likely to exclude ethnic minorities is offensive – and racist. In light of Hindu ethics and religious ethics more broadly, if community meals are to be inclusive, they must be vegan.

Conclusion

Multiculturalism is about acceptance, about sharing different ways, about dropping prejudice to try something different so that we do not offend those whose ways are different from our own. Multiculturalism encourages people to create a supportive, inclusive environment rather than alienate those who do not share mainstream cultural traditions. Yet food proscriptions in the United States tend to prevent foods such as *boshintang*, *sanma aisui*, *balut*, and “dragon, tiger, phoenix big braise” from showing up at International Food Fairs around the country, although such feasts are billed as multicultural events. At first bite, it seemed that multiculturalism ought to

encourage the larger community to move beyond food prejudices that prevent cultural food sharing – that fridge doors and mouths ought to swing wide to accommodate dishes from around the world, carefully prepared and proudly presented – flesh of dog, fish ice cream, and fetal chicks. But examining foundational principles from Indian philosophy, universal religious ideals, contemporary animal agriculture practices in the United States, and lactose intolerance proves otherwise.

Indian philosophy provides a window into religious dietary ethics more broadly, all of which require compassion toward all living beings. A review of standard animal agricultural practices in the United States reveals an extremely cruel industry – especially with regard to dairy products. This highlights the importance of rethinking meal plans at international events out of respect for religious ethics, which require compassion, which precludes the consumption not only of flesh, but of all animal products. As it turns out, if we wish to be inclusive and avoid offense, we must discourage *boshintang*, *sanma aisui*, *balut*, and “dragon, tiger, phoenix big braise” at the community table, as well as vanilla yogurt, egg salad sandwiches, and hamburgers. Counterintuitively, those interested in fostering multiculturalism must *restrict* food possibilities at community meals as a matter of cultural sensitivity. In the spirit of Beardsworth and Keil, we must plan and execute community meals “with the mind as much as with the mouth” (1997: 53). When we understand religious ideals such as *ahimsa*, we understand why, if we wish to welcome all to the table – which would seem fundamental for any multicultural meal – community meals must be vegan.

Ahimsa and multiculturalism amid a meaty majority

There are now roughly two million Hindus in the United States – a significant cultural minority (OntarioTolerance.org 2015). They are vastly outnumbered by omnivores in a nation “where meat is consumed at more than three times the global average” (Daniel et al. 2015). In the United States, meals are not generally considered complete without flesh; whether in Baltimore or Billings, meat dishes are to be expected (unless specifically indicated). Those gathering at the community table might also expect to find themselves seated across from a Hindu who does not eat meat – especially meat from cows. At any community meal in the United States, as in many other wealthy nations, Hindus are likely to be confronted with meat eaters sitting across from them – *himsa* (violence), often against revered cows. What stand should multiculturalism take with regard to this uncomfortable yet common predicament?

Multiculturalism calls us to respect diverse cultural traditions. This requires, at a minimum, that we *avoid excluding and offending minorities*. At the community table, multiculturalism ought to stand as a force against serving foods – even normative foods such as meat and eggs – that are *proscribed for and offensive to others, such as Hindus*. Offering eggs and

flesh – especially the flesh of cows – at a community meal is culturally insensitive in light of Indian philosophy and Hindu dietary proscriptions. What people do in their own homes, or when they visit the homes of others, is a separate matter. The question here is, why bring foods to the community table that are proscribed for minority populations – especially given the plethora of wonderful alternatives, including staples such as corn, rice, oats, and potatoes.⁵

Notes

- 1 Not only are there no vegan restaurants in Billings, there are no vegetarian restaurants, and finding a vegan meal at many restaurants can be challenging. Only in the last few years have restaurants started to be familiar with the term “vegan”, although this does not mean that your meal will actually be vegan when it arrives. Whenever my credit union or any other local business offers a get-together, it is usually a hamburger barbeque. Generally speaking, people either eat meat or they do not show up. These practices exclude vegans and vegetarians, and there are also ample examples of overt hostility. For example, when I mentioned at church that I was sad during thanksgiving because of the slaughter and the suffering, a member of the congregation said that he would eat some extra meat for me. Although a progressive church, no one called him on his behavior. My vegan and vegetarian friends often mention similar instances of hostility and rejection. In Montana (as elsewhere in the country), meat-eating is a protected norm often expressed in defensiveness.
- 2 “Anymal” (a contraction of “any” and “animal”, pronounced like “any” and “mal”), refers to *all* animals who do not happen to be the same species as the speaker/author. This means that if a signing chimpanzee signs “anymal”, human beings will be included in this reference, and the chimpanzee will not. In the case of this article, the speaker/author is a human being, so “anymal” refers to any animal who is not a human being. Avoiding “non” and “other”, anymal is neither dualistic nor speciesist.
- 3 Generally speaking, Hindus eat dairy products but not eggs, although coastal communities tend to eat fish. (See Harris 1985; Wiley 2011; Yadav and Sanjay 2006.)
- 4 Morally, it makes no sense to choose to be a vegetarian who consumes *more* dairy to replace flesh products. *To reduce suffering, we must cut back or eliminate all animal products.*
- 5 It is important to note that, in any instance where diet is not a choice, there is no moral requirement to avoid animal products – or any other products. Affordable, available food options are essential to choice, and choice is essential to ethics.

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